

## Californiana and Western Americana

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AS THE SUBJECT of this paper is so vast, and its scope begins shortly before my entry into the book world, I will attempt to cover only those particular phases with which I have had firsthand experience. Californiana and Western Americana as a distinct feature of the book world is so new—comparatively—and so varied in its aspects, that these personal experiences are only part of the story.

H. R. Wagner, the great dean of Western Americana, once stated that the first rare western book to bring a high price was E. S. Ingalls' *Journal of a Trip to California by the Overland Route Across the Plains in 1850-51* (Waukegan (Ill.), 1852), item no. 1098 in the sale of *The Valuable Private Library of Lucius L. Hubbard of Houghton, Michigan, consisting almost wholly of Rare Books and Pamphlets relating to American History*. This sale was held in New York City in May, 1914, and the Ingalls brought \$145.

Of course, nearly all the notable collections of Americana in existence in 1914 contained many books in the fields of Californiana and Western Americana which were acquired as Americana but not primarily as Californiana or Western Americana. Works about Drake or Cabeza de Vaca would be examples. The exception to the above was the collecting of Californiana and Western Americana by libraries and by private collectors because of almost exclusively local interest.

In July, 1932, I went from Stanford University to work for my father, John Howell, in his rare book shop in San Francisco. The shop was supposed to conduct a general business in rare books, but actually there was hardly any business at all. The year 1932 fell in the middle of the depression and we had no active collectors in any field as customers. There were some buyers, but none of them were dedicated and intelligent collectors trying to form an important library. All the

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active collectors with whom my father had done business in the 1920's had stopped buying for one reason or another, mostly lack of funds.

As I had determined to spend my life in the rare book business, I set about acquiring all the knowledge that I could about the tremendously wide world of rare books, with strong emphasis on the field of Western Americana. I found that, in the case of rare books, experience in buying and selling was the best teacher; but, as I have said, there was no activity in this field, and my knowledge had to come from reading the published books about books and from picking the brains of those collectors, dealers, and librarians who had the experience. I became familiar with the working tools of Western Americana, tool Number One being R. E. Cowan's *Bibliography of the History of California and the Pacific West, 1510-1906*, (San Francisco, 1914), the "Bible" of the California collector and a book that I always kept at my elbow.

Other tools that I learned to use were: H. R. Wagner's *The Plains and the Rockies, A Bibliography of Original Narrative and Adventure 1860-1865*, published by my father in 1921; *Bibliography of the Spanish Southwest 1542-1794, An Annotated Bibliography*, (Berkeley, 1924); and *California Imprints August 1846-June 1851*, (Berkeley, 1922). The first two of these works supplemented Cowan and broadened the area of Western Americana, and the third covered the refined interest in collecting the first items printed in California during the American period.

Although Wagner had moved from Berkeley to San Marino to be near the collections which he had sold to Henry E. Huntington in the 1920's, he visited San Francisco many times and gave me opportunities to get from his encyclopedic memory complete and detailed answers to my many questions. It was most gratifying to ask Wagner for information about the rarity or importance of any book or pamphlet, as he had total recall of anything connected with books.

On becoming the librarian for William Andrews Clark, Jr., Cowan had left San Francisco, taking his large private collection of Californiana with him to Los Angeles. Cowan also came back to San Francisco frequently and I learned a great deal from him, too. His large collection of Californiana (which to a great extent was the basis of the enlarged 1933 edition of the *Bibliography*, containing five thousand Californiana titles as compared to 850 in the 1914 edition) was acquired by J. E. Goodwin, the librarian at the University of Cali-

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fornia at Los Angeles, in 1936. Cowan's collection was purchased before L. C. Powell became the U.C.L.A. librarian and before a department of special collections was established. Cowan items were distributed through the stacks and some valuable rarities were treated without proper respect. This collection contained many expensive rarities from the J. L. Hitchcock collections which my father had bought in 1925.

U.C.L.A. authorities were unwilling to accept the valuation that Cowan had placed on his collection (\$50,000, the sum total of the prices of the individual books), but had it checked by a librarian with no experience in the rare book field, who looked up the items in *American Book Prices Current* (tabulating, for example, as many as ten prices on the very common Venegas) and took an average. It has always seemed to me that, if Cowan's figures were thought unacceptable, it would have been simpler and less expensive for the U.C.L.A. authorities to have secured the advice of some experts in the field.

In the 1920's G. D. Lyman of San Francisco built up the largest private collection of Californiana. He tried to acquire all of the 850 items listed in the 1914 Cowan and managed to get over 720 of them. I remember how disappointed he was in the 1930's that prices of Californiana were so low, and that there was no interest in the field even after the national economy started climbing out of the depression. My advice to Lyman was that, as he knew the field so well, he should write about the collecting of Californiana and thus stimulate new collectors. I could not, however, persuade him to take my advice, although the success of the three books he had written about the West had made him well aware of the great number of readers of California history.

The most distinguished private library of Californiana built up since the days of H. H. Bancroft was surely the collection formed by C. T. Crocker. It was not large in number of volumes, but rich in rarities and manuscripts. The very knowledgeable Edward Eberstadt, who more than any other single individual stimulated the activity in expensive rarities of Western Americana, supplied Crocker with most of the rare and important books. Crocker stopped collecting in 1926 and put his collection out on loan with the California Historical Society, which he and Wagner had helped to reorganize in 1922. Crocker later made a gift of the collection to the Society.

T. W. Norris of Livermore, California, created a fine Californiana library in the thirties and forties, largely with the help of H. C.

Holmes of Oakland. When Norris retired and moved to Carmel in 1946, Holmes bought the collection (exclusive of the manuscripts and Grabhorn books) and published a magnificent catalog which was printed by the Grabhorn Press. This catalog served many individuals as a guide to prices, but it is now out of date.

*Libros Californianos* by P. T. Hanna, published by Jake Zeitlin in 1931, did a great deal to guide the readers of California history in the selection of a reading library. Some who started gathering Hanna's twenty-five books, or five-foot California bookshelf, went on to collect the series of distinctive and inexpensive reprints of Western Americana issued by the Grabhorn Press from 1932 to 1937. This awakened the readers to many important source books. These reprints have become sought after, as have nearly all other distinctive reprints of Western Americana.

Since there were no active buyers of the topflight Western material in the West during the 1930's, nearly all of our treasures and, for that matter, almost all of the treasures of other western dealers in Western Americana went East.

E. D. Graff of Chicago, T. W. Streeter of Morristown, New Jersey, D. M. Frost of Boston, P. A. Rollins of New York City, and W. R. Coe, also of New York City, were the great buyers in the East (which to a Californian includes Graff's Illinois). Of these five great collectors only Streeter collected actively in the California field, and if he already had an important and expensive California item, it was very difficult to find another buyer for the same title. So we sold some items locally at far below the market price, in order to make sure that some of the great Western books stayed in the West. But even this was difficult.

A classic example of an important California item that went begging was the *Pamphlet edition of the laws of California*, containing the Constitution of California and Acts of the Legislature as passed by the first legislature in San Jose and printed there in 1850. It was one of five such collections known. As nobody was interested locally, I offered it to Streeter for \$1,250 in 1937, but he turned it down, as he already had so much of the material contained in the volume. I then cataloged it, but nobody wanted it; at least nobody asked for it at the price quoted. However, I learned that the Law Library of the Library of Congress had more money to spend than there were books to buy and would be in the market for the *Pamphlet edition of the laws of California*, which we eventually placed with them. The price

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of \$9,000 which I paid at the October, 1959, Parke-Bernet auction for the Cutten-Plath copy of this book, being the fifth copy known and the only one in private hands, is a commentary on the increased prices and activity in Californiana. I brought this volume back to the West Coast, where it is now in an important private collection.

In the past fifteen years other western dealers and I have secured a great many other important and valuable western books in the East and brought them West. This has been a great development of recent years. The starting point of the increase of interest and activity in Californiana dates from the publication in the fall of 1945 of a selective bibliography of Californiana entitled *The Zamorano 80, a selection of distinguished California books made by members of the Zamorano Club*. Not only did collectors of Californiana examine their own holdings to see what they lacked and try to fill in the gaps with original or reprint editions as suited their pocketbooks; almost all other collectors of Western Americana throughout the country generally did the same.

As the *Zamorano 80* was the work of amateur scholars, all members of a collectors' club, it is interesting to note that the library of the amateur scholar has replaced the general American library of the past. Some of these amateur scholars have written important bibliographies, articles, and introductions in the field of Western Americana.

In addition to Wagner, Cowan, and Hanna, the work of the following amateur scholars and bibliographers has had the greatest influence on the collectors of Western Americana: C. L. Camp, F. P. Farquhar, E. D. Graff, G. L. Harding, J. G. Layne, L. P. Merrill, H. T. Peters, L. C. Powell, T. W. Streeter, and C. I. Wheat.

Naturally the exciting, informative, and often scholarly catalogs of expert dealers in Western Americana are effective in stimulating the interest of collectors. In addition, the disposal at auction of great collections of Western Americana by its very nature creates enthusiasm. Among the auction sales during the last thirty-three years of important libraries devoted entirely or largely to Western Americana are the following: W. C. Braislin, March 1927; G. W. Paullin, April 1929; G. Y. Barber, October 1941; C. G. Littell, February 1945; H. S. Auerbach, October 1947; W. J. Holliday, April 1954; L. E. Bauer, December 1958; and H. W. Plath, October 1959.

The formation of the Holliday collection is typical of the manner in which many Western Americana collections have been developed. Holliday started out in the 1930's to acquire all the books there were

to read about the area in the West where his ranch was located (Tucson, Arizona). Being a collector by instinct, he, of course, went further into the field of Western Americana.

Nearly all of the important holdings of Western Americana in the institutional libraries of this country are the result of acquiring en bloc, by gift or purchase, the libraries of private collectors. I would like to note the following collections of Western Americana in our institutional libraries: the Augustin S. Macdonald collection at the Henry E. Huntington Library, which was bought by Huntington in 1914; the Philip Ashton Rollins collection at Princeton; the Robert E. Cowan and J. Gregg Layne collections at U.C.L.A.; the Robert S. Ellison collection at Indiana University; the Donald McKay Frost collection of the American Antiquarian Society; and the William Robertson Coe collection at Yale. The continued activity of additions to the Coe collection is in part due to the large endowment secured by J. T. Babb from Coe when the latter was alive. It is unfortunate that too few institutions receive endowments for additions to the collections for which they are authorized to expend moneys.

Friends of the Library groups have assisted many institutions with extra funds to add to their collections. Certain librarians have recognized that many rare book dealers have the ear of rich alumni who are not necessarily collectors, but who can assist wholly or in part with the acquisition of notable books or collections. For example, just last year my colleague Jake Zeitlin and I raised \$26,000 to assist the Bancroft Library at the University of California in acquiring a \$45,000 collection of manuscripts. Our success in raising the money was due largely to the recognition by the Bancroft's director, G. P. Hammond, that rare book dealers are more than merchants.

The number of book dealers today who devote all or a good part of their time to the handling of Western Americana is easily ten to fifteen times the number of twenty years ago. Many in the 1920's and 1930's who devoted full time to such specialties as modern first editions, children's books, English literature, and Press books, have almost entirely given up these specialties and are now handling Western Americana. This is a second great development of recent years and is, of course, due to the great activity of collectors and libraries. Within the states that make up the territory which once belonged to Spain (i.e., California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas), the California collector seems to be the only one who will buy the original source books in Spanish even if he does not read the language.

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One of my complaints in the 1930's was that I could not get hold of enough money to buy any of the inactive good collections in private hands and develop new collectors to whom I could show a large quantity of interesting items. Today I, as well as other dealers in Western Americana, do not complain of a short supply of discriminating collectors or money, but rather of the short supply of good books and collections. Auction prices, particularly those realized at the already mentioned record-breaking Plath Sale, reflect the great demand that exists for these scarce books.